

FIGHTING IN THE PHALANX: THE MORAL NATURE OF THE ὍΠΛΗΤΙΚΗ ΤΕΧΝΗ

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These pages wish to offer a brief reflection on an aspect of the process of professionalization that Greek warfare underwent from the end of the fifth century BC onward (all dates hereafter BC). The analysis will focus on the content and nature of the τέχνη that the Greek hoplite ought to acquire to become a χειροτέχνης — an expert artisan in *massed combat*.¹ The intention is to explore whether this τέχνη could be understood not as technical proficiency in a certain military skill that the hoplite acquires by practice but as a choice he is trained to make between εὐταξία and ἀταξία. These terms, usually understood in a technical acceptance as ‘order / discipline’ and ‘disorder / insubordination’, will be presented here as frames of mind [ἦθη τῆς ψυχῆς] and discussed in the light of Plato’s use of the terms εὐνουχία and κακονουχία as hallmarks of the good and bad hoplite.

Introduction

[...] so how can you pick up a shield — or any other weapon or instrument of war — and immediately be equipped to take your place in the battle-line, [ὁπλιτικὴ μάχη] or in any of the other sorts of fighting which occur in time of war? Think of other instruments: there isn’t one of them that will turn a person into a craftsman or athlete simply by being picked up or that will be of any use to him if he has no expertise [ἐπιστήμη] or has not had enough practice in handling it.

Pl. *Rep.* 2.374dl-61²

Plato’s words³ are representative of a discussion, beginning as early as the fifth century BC, on the need for Athens to train and deploy a more professional type of

¹ As opposed to *mass combat* (cf. van Wees, 1994:15 n. 7). For χειροτέχνης cf. Xen. *Lac.* As 11.2.

² Unless otherwise noted, the translations are of the author.

³ Socrates is trying here to make a theoretical point, and get Glaucon to agree that the military needs to be governed by the principle of specialisation according to natural ability, upon which the ideal city is founded. Although the discussion is not on historical facts, it is probably informed by the very historical concern the Athenians had about their own phalanx, usually regarded as the weakest unit of the army (cf. Plut. *Them.* 4.3; Xen. [*Ath. Pol.*] 2.1). My choice of starting a discussion on ancient warfare with Plato may give raise to perplexities (see Schwartz 2009:18-20), yet the philosopher ought to

soldier. The point he is making is clear: the ὄπλα alone are not enough to turn a soldier into a hoplite,⁴ because a specific ἐπιστήμη regarding war is required, as for the practice of every other cultural activity. Therefore, there is a certain τέχνη or τεχνικὴ περὶ τὸν πόλεμον ἀγωνία⁵ that soldiers engaging in the ὀπλιτικὴ μάχη ought to learn, if they are to fight not just as amateurs but as τεχνῖται of the phalanx.⁶ Contemporary scholarship has studied the different aspects of the professionalisation⁷ of ancient Greek warfare — a gradual process starting in the fifth century and reaching an apex in the fourth century, with Philip II's

have gained some experience in military matters, during the time he served as a guard with other Athenian young men (*cf.* Thuc. 1.105.4; 2.13.6-7 for examples of military incidents that could involve the new levees). He may not have undergone a 'regular programme of training' (Van Wees 2004:94, *contra* Hornblower 2007:35-36), yet he must have become familiar with military operations, with a chance for actual combat (*cf.* Thuc. 4.67.2; 8.92.2). Finally, if we are to accept the tradition related to his time of birth (429-427) he is likely to have served in the Athenian army at the very least during the final years of the Peloponnesian War (409-404). Therefore, both Plato and his *dramatis persona* Socrates (whose military experience is not in dispute, *cf.* Pl. *Symp.* 219e-21b; Pl. *Lach.* 181 b5-c1; *Apol.* 28e1-4) would appear to be fully competent to discuss military matters. On Plato as a trustworthy source on military matters, *cf.* also Anderson 1984:152.

⁴ For a discussion on the origin, development and meaning of the term ὀπλίτης see Echeverría 2012:295-303. As I deal with the hoplite in the fifth and fourth centuries, the understanding of the term as 'heavy-armed infantryman' (*cf.* Echeverría 2012:313) should not be in question.

⁵ Pl. *Rep.* 2.374d 2.

⁶ *Cf.* Xen. *Lac.* 13.5, where as an echo of Plato the Spartans are addressed as τεχνῖται in what Plato has called ὀπλιτικὴ μάχη, whereas the rest of the Greeks are considered at best αὐτοσχεδιασταί, i.e. the improvised soldiers whom Plato criticises. The Spartan mastery in the hoplitic τέχνη, along with the edge it would have granted in battle, was perceived to be so important that tradition had Lyscurgus forbid the Spartans to fight frequently with the same enemy, so as not to train them unwittingly in hoplite warfare (see Plut. *Ages.* 26.2). However, Plutarch could here be lending greater nobility to what may have been a shrewd Spartan psychological trick: in fact, Spartan diplomacy would have been very careful to preserve the awe and reputation surrounding its army by carefully avoiding fighting whenever possible (*cf.* Cartledge 1977:11, n. 3), which of course it did.

⁷ Namely the creation, in the late fifth and fourth centuries, of ἐπιλεκτοί, full-time military élite units whose upkeep was funded by the city-state (see Hunt 2007:144-145 with bibliography and sources), the passage to a type of conscription based on age group, at least for Athens (*cf.* Christ 2001:416-418), and the introduction of a more centralised and formal type of training, such as the Athenian *ephebeia*, aimed at providing specific training in ὀπλομαχεῖν, τοξεύειν, ἀκοντίζειν, καταπαλτὴν ἀφίεναι (see Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 42.3.4-5, Pritchett 1974:208; Van Wees 2004:94).

contributions to the field.⁸ Thus far, scholarship seems to have identified the main trait of this process as a steady increase of the soldier's proficiency in a set of military skills,⁹ brought about by the institution of a formal training program managed by a central power that trains and employs him as a professional throughout the year. My aim in this article is to reconsider the main sources for this period regarding the content and nature of the τέχνη that specifically pertains to what Plato calls the ὀπλιτικὴ μάχη, the τέχνη required to effectively fight within a phalanx. My intent is to explore whether this τέχνη, and the military professionalisation which it represents, could be understood, with limited reference to the phalanx, not as the mastery of a certain military skill but rather as the acquisition and practice of a certain mental disposition, an ἥθος τῆς ψυχῆς, into which the professional hoplite is trained.

The τέχνη of the phalanx: Hand-to-hand combat, τάξις and εὐψυχία

As has been noted,¹⁰ unlike Roman military training,¹¹ proficiency in hand-to-hand combat would not seem to be a suitable candidate for the content of this τέχνη. The available source material shows that the basics of fighting, understood either as striking an opponent, or defending oneself, is something that belongs to the realm of φύσις, and therefore opposite to that of τέχνη. As we read in Xenophon:

[...] We have been initiated into a method of fighting [at close quarters], which, I observe, all men naturally [φύσις] understand, just as in case of other creatures each understands some method of fighting which it has not learned from any other source than from instinct [φύσις] ... [The animals] all know how to protect themselves, too, against that from which they most need protection, and that, too, though they have never gone to school to any teacher [διδάσκαλος].

Xen. Cyr. 2.3.9¹²

As fighting is inborn [ἐμπεφυκός] in men and seen as an instinctual reflex, like walking or running, its rudiments do not need to be taught or learnt:

⁸ Sustained by the wealth coming from the Macedonian mines and his continuous successful conquests, Philip was in fact able to 'maintain his army on a full-time professional basis, so that they both campaigned and trained hard year round' (Hunt 2007:145-6; cf. Dem. 8.11; 18.235).

⁹ Skills that differ in accordance to the type of unit where the soldier is deployed (Hunt 2007:133).

¹⁰ Anderson 1991:28; Van Wees 2004:91; Hunt 2007:133.

¹¹ Veg. *Epit.* 1.11-12.

¹² Miller 1960.

[...] Even when I was a little fellow, I used to seize a sword wherever I saw one, although, I declare, I had never learned, except from instinct [παρὰ τῆς φύσεως] even how to take hold of a sword [...] And, by Zeus, I used to hack with a sword everything that I could without being caught at it. For it was not only instinctive, like walking and running, but I thought it was fun in addition to its being natural [ἡδὺ πρὸ τῷ πεφυκέναι].

Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.10¹³

Spear and sword are almost extensions of the soldier's body, like an animal's claws or horns.¹⁴ Moreover, fighting at close quarters makes missing the target virtually impossible¹⁵ and the emphasis is usually on the bravery showed by the soldier as he interlocks with the enemy, rather than on the skills he displays while he fights.¹⁶

Since hand-to-hand combat was not considered part of military τέχνη,¹⁷ the ability to keep the battle formation of the phalanx [τάξις]¹⁸ seems the next best

¹³ Miller 1960.

¹⁴ On the contrary, the use of 'non-natural' weapons such as the bow and the javelin requires the acquisition of a specific skill and its practice; cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.16: 'Now, up to this time you have been bowmen and throwers of javelins, and so have we; and if you were not quite our equals in the use of these arms, there is nothing surprising about that; for you had not the leisure to practice with them that we had'. The same goes for horsemanship, which required training in learning the three basic skills of 'mounting quickly, riding in formation, wielding the sword or spear and throwing the javelin from horseback' (Hunt 2007:134; cf. Van Wees 2004:93). Athenian riders were trained in these skills also through the ἀνθιπασία, a sham fight on horseback featuring charge and retreat (cf. Xen. *Eq. mag.* 3.11).

¹⁵ Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.16: 'We must strike those opposed to us at such close range that we need not fear to miss our aim when we strike'. A close echo of these words may be found in Anderson 1970:84.

¹⁶ Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.11, stating that hand-to-hand combat 'demands courage (προθυμία) more than proficiency (τέχνη)'. Cf. also Plut. *Apophthegmata Laconica* 241f, for the reply 'add a step to it' given by a Spartan mother to a son complaining about the short length of the Spartan ξίφος.

¹⁷ One may object that by the end of the 5th and throughout the 4th century ὀπλομάχοι would seem to be in high demand as private instructors of 'hoplite fighting' (Hunt 2007: 133-134), teaching 'taktika, that is, weapons handling, individual and unit drill' (Hunt 2007:214, quoting Aen. *Tact.* 3.4). However, Plato presents them mainly in relation to individual combat, and often in a negative light. He dismisses the usefulness of their teaching in a phalanx (*contra* Cawkwell 1989:378) by having Nicias say that 'the greatest advantage of this training will be felt when the ranks are broken' (Pl. *Lach.* 182a7; cf. Anderson 1991:30), and Laches remark that if there were anything useful in their art 'it would not have been overlooked by the Spartans' (Pl. *Leg.* 182e 6-7; cf. also Pl. *Lach.* 183d-184a on the ὀπλομάχος Stesileos, cf. Schwartz 2009:94-95). On the other hand, a passage from Xenophon (*Lac.* 11.8) points to the ὀπλομάχοι as teachers in τάξις, cf. Wheeler 1983:13-18.

candidate. Modern scholarship and relevant sources acknowledge its importance to the phalanx: ‘an army in disorder [ἄτακτος] is a confused mass, an easy prey to enemies [...] and utterly useless [ἀχρηστότατον]’ says Xenophon,¹⁹ choosing a term later on used by Aristotle as he defines as ἄχρηστος a phalanx whose τάξις has been lost.²⁰ However, despite the consensus on τάξις as a key element for the phalanx, no fifth or fourth century BC sources engaging in the debate on warfare describe drills specially designed to train the soldiers in this skill.²¹ Likewise, they do not express any concern about their absence nor do they suggest their adoption. Plato seems to concern himself with formation-drills when he states that the legislator should institute ‘field operations’ for the army, one of a ‘minor kind’ to be held daily and without the ὄπλα,²² and one of a ‘major kind’, to be held once every month in full armour, constituting sham battles where soldiers will be ...

[...] contending with one another in the capturing of forts [κατάληψις χωρίων] and in ambuscades [ἐνέδρα] and in all forms of mimic warfare; in fact, they shall do literal fighting with balls and darts as nearly real as possible, although the points of the darts shall be made less dangerous,

¹⁸ From Thucydides onward, the term takes the specific meaning of ‘battle formation’ (cf. Wheeler 2007:192; Echeverría 2012:308-310).

¹⁹ Xen. *Oec.* 8.4. Cf. also Xen. *Eq. Mag.* 2.7 on the importance of τάξις in the deployment of the cavalry.

²⁰ Arist. *Pol.* 4.1297b19-20. Xenophon’s remarks are likely to derive from his personal expertise in the field, and are evidently confirmed for earlier events: when hoplites are deployed ἄτακτος and without κόσμος heavy losses are to be expected (cf. Thuc. 3.108.3, where the Peloponnesians retreat in ἀτάξια suffering heavy losses, with the exception of the Mantineans ‘who kept their ranks best of any in the army during the retreat’), especially when they fight against a tightly ordered phalanx (cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.16-17, where the fight is between hoplites ἄσύντακτοι and those συντεταγμένοι, with the former meeting a bitter end). On the contrary, a tightening of the formation can save a phalanx and prevent losses, even when in dire situations (cf. Thuc. 1.63.1). Aristotle will further theorise Xenophon’s position by placing the τάξις at the heart of the hoplite fighting, to the extent that if the notion of it is altogether missing in warfare, then so is the notion of the phalanx itself (*Pol.* 4.1297b20-2).

²¹ According to Van Wees, the Spartan army would have been trained in some formation-drills when engaged in a military campaign (see Van Wees 2004:92), yet Xenophon makes no mention of these exercises. Therefore, even if the Spartans did actually train to maintain their skills in τάξις, Xenophon’s silence about it, coupled with his interest in noting instead their care for physical fitness, would offer an even clearer insight on the priority of the latter over the former.

²² Probably this type of training was aimed mainly at conditioning the body, as the reference to χοροί and γυμναστική (*Leg.* 830d5-6) would suggest. Plato also suggests military tournaments [μάχαι ἐορταστικαί] be performed once a month (see Pl. *Leg.* 8.829c).

in order that their game of combat may not be completely devoid of fear [ὅπως μὴ παντάπασιν ἄφοβος γίγνηται], but may provide terrors [δείματα] and indicate to some extent who is strong-hearted [εὐψυχος] and who not. To the former the lawgiver shall duly assign honours, to the latter demerit [...]

Pl. *Leg.* 8.830e1-12²³

In line with military tradition, Plato would, then, suggest the use of sham battles as a preparation for war. Nevertheless, to read this passage as a yearning for a more specialised phalanx group-training, probably as a result of the on-going process of military professionalisation,²⁴ would seem to go beyond the author's intentions. Plato highlights two situations, the taking of a fortress and the laying of an ambush, that have little to do with the phalanx. Sham field battles aimed at training soldiers in *τάξις* are *de facto* omitted, their importance apparently downplayed. Moreover, to gain a better understanding of the passage we need to set the key terms used by Plato — *δείματα*, *ἄφοβος*, *εὐψυχος* — into their proper interpretative frame. While discussing a few chapters earlier how infants should be reared, Plato points out that fear [*δείματα*] is to be considered as 'a poor condition of the soul' (Pl. *Leg.* 7.790e9), and that an infant's soul which is left within its grip 'will be specially liable to become timid: and this ... is not to practise courage, but cowardice' (Pl. *Leg.* 7.791b4-7). The remedy he proposes is simple: every soul should practise courage 'from youth up' (Pl. *Leg.* 7.791b10), slowly acquiring what he calls an *ἐπιτήδευμα τῆς ἀνδρείας*, a habit of courage, which he further defines as 'the conquering of the frights [*δείματα*] and fears [*φόβοι*] that assail us' (Pl. *Leg.* 7.791c1). Finally, Plato sets this habit and the cheerfulness that derives from it as requisites for the soul to gain a condition of *εὐψυχία*, the 'proper' or 'right' disposition, the very purpose of the education and the opposite of *κακοψυχία*,²⁵ its negative counterpart to which cowardice leads and that is to be avoided.

If we set the key terms of *Leg.* 8.830d-e in the interpretative frame set by Plato's remarks on education, the main impression is that the purpose of the sham battles is not to make the soldier more skilled but simply more courageous. To this end, Plato stresses that the key to the success of this training is the recreation of an experience that is 'as nearly real as possible' to that of a real battle, precisely because he wishes the soldier to become familiar with the *δείματα* and *φόβοι* that

²³ Bury 1967.

²⁴ Van Wees 2004:90.

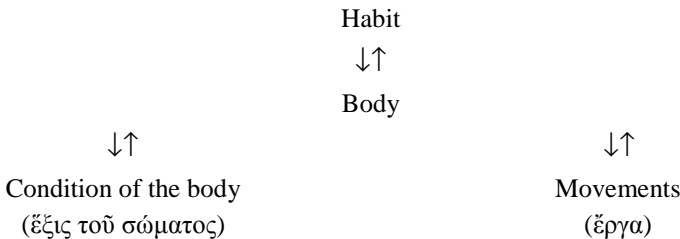
²⁵ Pl. *Leg.* 7.791c8-10.

come with it,²⁶ and gradually to learn how to bear them. His proficiency in warfare as well as his body, which is already subjected to daily training, may incidentally benefit from this practice. However, it is his *ψυχή* that really concerns Plato, what he wishes to train and induce into that *ἐπιτήδευμα τῆς ἀνδρείας* that he mentions at *Leg.* 7.791c1, the condition he has set to gain *εὐψυχία*. Aristotle seems to echo Plato's words on courage as a habit to be maintained through practice.²⁷ While neglecting any exercise aimed at practising *τάξις*, he will also make a stronger case for physical education as a means to acquire it. In his discussion on the upbringing of youth, he states that physical exercise should be taught not only because of its benefits to the body, but also because by working on the body a certain *ἦθος τῆς ψυχῆς* would be established:

[...] Since it is plain that education should be carried on first with habits [*ἦθος*] rather than by reasoning [*λόγος*], and by training the body [*σῶμα*] before the mind [*διάνοια*], it is clear from these considerations that the boys must be handed over to the care of physical exercise [*γυμναστική*] and to the art of gymnastic [*παιδοτριβική*]; of these, the former realizes a certain condition of the body [*ἔξις τοῦ σώματος*], while the latter provides training for the performing of certain movements [*ἔργα*].

Arist. *Pol.* 8.1338b 4-8

The process of education that Aristotle envisages may be presented through the following scheme:



²⁶ For the panic, fear and other gruesome aspects that the Greek hoplite may have experienced during the battle, and the importance of morale to win them, cf. Lazenby 1991:91-96; 104-106.

²⁷ Arist. *Eth. Nic* 1104b1-3 '[...] and the same [as temperance] with courage: we become brave by training ourselves to despise and endure terrors [τὰ φοβερά], and we shall be best able to endure terrors when we have become brave'.

Like τέχνη, ἥθος stands on the opposite side of φύσις as it conveys the idea of something that cannot be gained naturally.²⁸ Like τέχνη, one needs to practise it after its acquisition in order to maintain it, carrying out actions that bear its mark and foster its development.²⁹ From this perspective, the body is trained as the seat of the ἥθος itself, the concrete place where we may experience and understand its dynamics, attaining it through its actual practice and gradual realisation. In conclusion, it is true that ‘we pursue gymnastic for the sake of strength and health’,³⁰ Yet the training of the body ought to be regarded ὡς συντείνουσιν πρὸς ἀνδρείαν,³¹ as an activity whose ἔργα lead the soul to acquire the ἥθος of courage.³²

Returning to history, it is only around the time city-states began to raise permanent professional élite units³³ that we may find in our sources a more explicit reflection on τάξις, alongside the traditional appreciation for physical fitness in the hoplite³⁴ which we may now interpret through Plato and Aristotle as a mark of courage. Xenophon, who offers a definition of τάξις as the ability of ‘to carry on the fighting anyway, with any troops at hand, even in case the line gets into confusion’,³⁵ presents the only available descriptions of a sham field battle (Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.17-20) and of a formation-drill (Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.21-22). However, the sham field battle cannot be taken as evidence for τάξις training, since no phalanx is

²⁸ Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1103a 18-19: ‘and from this is clear that none of the moral virtues appears inherent to us by nature [φύσις]’.

²⁹ In this respect, says Aristotle, moral virtues such as courage are much like crafts or arts, for ἂ [...] μαθόντας ποιεῖν, ταῦτα ποιοῦντες μανθάνομεν (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1103a 32).

³⁰ Arist. *Pol.* 8.1338a 19-20.

³¹ Arist. *Pol.* 8.1337b 27.

³² Aristotle’s examination of ‘courage’ as a virtue is clearly more complex, yet for the purpose of the discussion one does not need to proceed. For an analysis of the Aristotelian virtue of courage cf. Sanford 2010:440-444; also Van Wees 2004:193.

³³ Without taking into consideration the case of the Spartan ἱππεῖς (see Lazenby 1985:10-12), the existence of military élite troops in Greek city-states may be traced back as early as 461, namely the chosen Six Hundred at Syracuse (cf. Diod. 11.76.2; Wheeler 2007:220), and to Thucydides’ mention of a unit of 1000 Argives, trained at the state’s expense (Thuc. 5.67.1). However, it is not clear whether they were true professionals, that is standing units undergoing a full-year training at the expense of the state, or just ‘picked [λογάδες] men in an amateur army’ (Hunt 2007:144, with sources), chosen for their physical excellence as was the case with the 300 picked Athenian men (see Plut. *Arist.* 114). Limiting the discussion to mainland Greece, it may perhaps be safer to consider the Theban Sacred Band, established in 379, as the first professional élite military unit, followed right away by the Arcadian ἐπάρκιοι (371) maintained with funds from the sanctuary of Olympia (cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.33; Roy 2002:317, n. 29).

³⁴ Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.16, where prizes are offered to the division of hoplites that has ἀριστα σωμαίων, whereas the other units — cavalry, archers, javelin-throwers — receive a prize in relation to their skills.

³⁵ Xen. *Lac.* 11.7.

involved.³⁶ Instead, Cyrus' interest is piqued by the obedience displayed by the soldiers during the exercise, and by the cheerfulness [εὐθυμία] they found in it.³⁷ In Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.21-22 we find the description of two types of formation movements, one of which (2.3.22) is explicitly said to be rehearsed 'in case it became necessary to lead the men away from the enemy', i.e. in case of retreat. Xenophon may be describing here a practice of the Spartan army, which he takes as a model for the army Cyrus is organising.³⁸ If this is the case, it is interesting to note that Cyrus does not rejoice in the τάξις displayed by the soldiers in their manoeuvres *per se*. In fact, the spotlight is rather on the skills of their commander; he commands his troops with πρᾶότης, yet he is obeyed,³⁹ and he receives praise for ἐπιμέλεια as he devised an exercise the purpose of which is to 'get [the soldiers] into the habit [ἐθίζω] of obeying just the same, whether they follow or whether they lead' (2.3.22). In both cases the main aim of the training is to induce the soldiers into the habit of following orders and not to enhance their skill in formation. As Xenophon says, while discussing the reasons behind the Spartan military superiority, learning how to organise and maintain a τάξις properly, however key to it, is not, to use a modern phrase, rocket science:

It is so easy to learn this formation [τάξις] that no man who knows how to distinguish a man from another can possibly fail. For leadership is granted to some, others are [sc. simply] ordered to follow. The deployments are verbally announced by the captain as if by a herald [...]. The battle-lines are then drawn up thinner or deeper. Nothing whatever of these movements is difficult to learn.

Xen. *Lac.* 11.6⁴⁰

For τάξις to be realised on the battlefield soldiers only need to follow orders, not necessarily to understand them. Therefore, the problems begin when the orders are not carried out, that is when amateur soldiers are not accustomed to the discipline

³⁶ As Xenophon stresses, Cyrus is particularly pleased because 'that side was victorious which was armed after the fashion of the Persians' (Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.19), whereas the losing side was armed with clay projectiles.

³⁷ 'Cyrus admired both the captain's cleverness and the men's obedience, and he was pleased to see that they were at the same time having their practice and find it a reason for cheerfulness [ἡθθυμοῦντο]' (Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.19). Cheerfulness of the soldiers as a result of the training is stressed again in Xen. *Cyr.* 2.3.20.

³⁸ Van Wees 2004:186, Christesen 2006:55-56, Wheeler 2007:207, n. 86.

³⁹ Xen. *Oec.* 21.4-5 where the author discusses the differences between the good and the bad leader. Xenophon would identify the good leader mainly by his quality of inspiring amongst the troops a natural disposition to obedience of which the key feature is again its cheerful nature [οὐκ ἄθυμως].

⁴⁰ Lipka 2002.

established by the στρατιωτικὸς βίος.⁴¹ Still, the term ἐθίζω used by Xenophon shows that discipline and obedience to orders cannot be considered — and in fact are never presented — as skills. They are habits, ἥθη. This is why Xenophon portrays a Cyrus eager to appoint contests for soldiers aimed not at training their hand-to-hand combat or their proficiency in τάξις, but in what

[...] He knew it was important for soldiers to practise [...] to the private soldier, that he shows himself obedient to the officers, ready for hardship, eager for danger but subject to good discipline [εὐταξία], familiar with the duties required of a soldier, neat in the care of his equipment, and ambitious about all such matters ...

Xen. Cyr. 2.1.22⁴²

Seen from the Aristotelian perspective discussed before, the training set by these contests may be considered as a way to induce into the trainee the ἥθη he needs to acquire in order to become a professional soldier: obedience, willingness to endure physical strain and bravery tempered by discipline,⁴³ but also care for the equipment while in camp, and an overall familiarity with, and acceptance of, the duties requested of a soldier in a professional army. Thus, what Xenophon presents is again a practice aimed at training the ψυχὴ of the soldier, not his skills. This may explain why the author seems so keen on emphasising cheerfulness as the mood a leader should try to infuse into his troops. On this note, although links between Plato and Xenophon are elusive at best⁴⁴ one cannot but remark on their agreement on the key role played in warfare by the psychological dynamic of morale, which Plato has set at the basis of his εὐψυχία.

Markers in a linguistic field: ἀταξία and εὐταξία

The sources considered thus far seem to support the choice of identifying the content of the τέχνη mentioned by Plato as a mental disposition, an ἥθος τῆς ψυχῆς, the acquisition and practice of which separates the τεχνίτης of the phalanx

⁴¹ Arist. *Pol.* 2.1270a 4-6. On the problems and ways of keeping the discipline in ‘amateur’ armies cf. Van Wees 2004:108-113; Hunt 2007:131-132.

⁴² Miller 1960.

⁴³ Perhaps Xenophon is echoing Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 2.2: ‘the man who runs away from everything in fear and never endures anything becomes a coward; the man who fears nothing whatsoever but encounters everything becomes rash’, cf. also Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 2.7-8.

⁴⁴ Danzig 2005:332-334 considering the case of the two *Symposia*.

from its αὐτοσχεδιαστής.⁴⁵ According to Plato, this disposition is that of εὐψυχία, whereas its opposite κακοψυχία marks the souls of the amateur. However, both terms need to be further clarified, for even if Plato points towards courage and cheerfulness as the requisites of the former and cowardice and gloominess as marks of the latter, this simple sum does not seem capable of exhausting the meaning of the two terms. Insights may thus come from setting Plato's theoretical contribution on warfare in its historical context, and exploring if authors preceding Plato have already conveyed the opposition nestled within the antithesis between the two words, although in different terms.

A well-known passage from Thucydides introduces a couple of opposites that seems to serve a similar purpose, i.e. to distinguish the amateurs from what he calls the 'artisans of war':

[...] It was their lack of discipline [ἀταξία] that had done the mischief. They had not, however, been so much inferior as might have been expected, especially as they had been pitted against troops who were the foremost among the Hellenes in experience, simple beginners [ἰδιῶται] so to speak, against skilled craftsmen [χειροτέχναι]. What had also done great mischief was [...] the confused disorganisation [ἄξύντακτον ἀναρχία] of many [soldiers]. If only [...] during this winter they should get the hoplite-force ready, providing arms [ὅπλα] for those who had none [...] and enforcing the general training, in all likelihood, he said, they would get the better of the enemy, if to courage [ἀνδρεία], which they had already, discipline [εὐταξία] were added to when it came to action.

Thuc. 6.72.3-4⁴⁶

Elected στρατηγός alongside Heracleides and Sicanius,⁴⁷ the Syracusan Hermocrates is analysing the causes of the defeat suffered at the hands of the Athenians.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ This observation is very much in line with Xenophon's remarks on the souls of the soldiers as the crucial factor that determines the outcome of a battle (cf. Xen. Cyr. 3.3.19; *Anab.* 3.1.42; cf. also Polyb. *fr.* 58 B-W).

⁴⁶ Smith 1966. However, the translation of the syntagm ἄξύντακτον ἀναρχία as confused disorganisation is mine.

⁴⁷ Cf. Thuc. 6.73.1-2; Diod. 13.4.1.

⁴⁸ Thucydides, probably acquainted with Hermocrates (cf. Fauber 2001:40), introduces him as someone who has gained unparalleled competence and valour in war through a first-hand experience of the battlefield (see Thuc. 6.72.2). However, if the main source for Thucydides' reconstruction of Hermocrates' deeds is indeed Hermocrates himself, then some dramatic reconstruction may be effecting the narrative, at least to a certain degree. Although Hermocrates' known involvement occurred after the siege of Syracuse, the use of the article before πόλεμος may

As he stresses twice, the problem does not lie with a want of courage, rather with the different quality of their army compared to the Athenians'. Although theirs is an ἦθος of ἀνδρεία, the majority of the Syracusan are ἰδιῶται, inexperienced in the ways of war, whereas fifteen years of war have made the Athenians experienced χειροτέχναι, 'artisans' of warfare. Hermocrates has already pointed out⁴⁹ the lack of military ἐπιστήμη and the resulting ἦθος that characterise the Syracusan;⁵⁰ here, he refers to their inexperience and amateurism through the term ἀταξία, describing its consequence on the battlefield with the expression ἡ ἀξύντακτος ἀναρχία — a vivid portrait of the confusion within the ranks resulting from soldiers deployed incompetently⁵¹ and under too many commanders. On the other side of the same linguistic field,⁵² its antonym εὐταξία characterises the Athenians as χειροτέχναι, soldiers whose experience in war has earned them the corresponding τέχνη, ideally making them εὐψυχοι. Hermocrates wants the Syracusan soldiers to acquire εὐταξία so that they may level the playing field with the Athenians. To this end, he suggests that the whole Syracusan army become professional, *i.e.* the supplying of ὅπλα at the

suggest that 'his experience and courage may have been of much longer standing than the fighting with Athens' (Gomme, Andrewes & Dover 1970:348). Recent scholarship has in fact re-evaluated his military brilliance regardless of the poor results achieved by Syracuse under his leadership (see Bloedow 1993:118-120). Therefore, we can consider the Syracusan general as a soldier that knows his trade, a professional well versed in the 'Platonic' τέχνη of hoplite combat.

⁴⁹ Cf. Thuc. 6.69.1. However, Thucydides' account could be influenced by Hermocrates, who would be stressing the lack of experience of his fellow-citizens to heighten the dramatic conclusion of the battle.

⁵⁰ Hermocrates gives credit to the Syracusan for their προθυμία and τόλμη, yet the two terms sketch a contradictory portrait of the army's ψυχή. While προθυμία is usually endowed with a positive meaning, τόλμα is more of an ambiguous word, often used in a negative connotation to convey the idea of 'recklessness', antithetic to that of ἀνδρεία. In Plato, the term is in hendiadys with entirely negative terms (cf. Pl. *Lac.* 197b4, with θρασύτης; cf. Pl. *Ap.* 38d7, with ἀναισχυντία), and Aristotle uses the adjective τολμηρόν to refer to an action that is 'daring' and not courageous because driven by the wrong impulse: cf. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1117a1-3, the impulse here being 'lust' [ἐπιθυμία]).

⁵¹ According to the narration of the battle given by Thucydides, the Syracusan ἀταξία would have started even before the engagement, as some of the Syracusan soldiers would have abandoned their ranks to visit their families, taking their places with no rationale just before the battle, 'here and there in the main body, as they joined it' (Thuc. 6.69.1).

⁵² I am here referring to the linguistic notion of a semantic or lexical field, which 'denotes a segment of reality symbolized by a set of related words' (Brinton 2000:112).

expense of the city and the institution of a formal and probably demanding⁵³ military training, devised to prepare the whole army εἰς τὸ ὀπλιτικόν. On the account of Hermocrates' analysis, it should be safe to accept εὐταξία and ἀταξία as the two key terms used by Thucydides to define professionalisation and amateurism in Greek warfare. Unlike Thucydides, Plato will continue to use these terms mainly in an ethical sense,⁵⁴ opting for the couple εὐψυχία — κακοψυχία to convey the opposition denoting possession or lack of what he identifies as the content of the τέχνη in the ὀπλιτικὴ μάχη:

τέχνη in ὀπλιτικὴ μάχη

	Professional (possession of)	Amateur (lack of)
	↓	↓
Thucydides	εὐταξία	ἀταξία
↓	↓	↓
Plato	εὐψυχία	κακοψυχία

But what do these terms mean? The term εὐταξία is generally translated as the sum of its parts, therefore as a τάξις = ‘battle formation’ that is somehow εὖ- = ‘appropriate’ or ‘effective’ for phalanx combat, and by extension as the ‘discipline’ that is required to keep it. As a result, εὐταξία is usually understood as a noun that denotes the artful keeping of phalanx in a *tight* yet *neat* formation so as to strengthen its cohesion, implicitly acknowledged as the key condition for its efficiency.⁵⁵ However, this interpretation is not entirely satisfying for two

⁵³ Tim. *FGrH* 566, f100a–c, where we read that the Spartan general Gylippos would have become extremely unpopular among the Syracusan precisely due to his attempts to impose a tight Spartan-like professional discipline on the soldiers.

⁵⁴ Cf. for instance the platonic inspired *Def.* 411d8–9, where εὐταξία is defined as “a harmony of the soul’s parts with one another”. What emerges from these sources is that τάξις, wherever applied, concerns the arrangement and effective cooperation of complex entities constituted from parts.

⁵⁵ Salmon 1977:90 envisages a fighting unit able to always keep its *cohesion* despite its large size; Snodgrass 1993:55 speaks of a thick yet *orderly* formation; Wheeler 2007:204 mentions the need of ensuring ‘the close *integrity* of the phalanx’s ranks and

reasons: First, it leads towards the understanding of εὐταξία as a skill that is connected to the Platonic εὐψυχία, which is clearly a state or a condition of the soul, and, second, the relationship that the English and Greek positive terms have with their antonyms would suggest something different — *cohesion* and *close order* are clarified and further defined in their meaning by their antonyms *inconsistency* / *disintegration* and *disorder* / *anarchy*,⁵⁶ but the concepts they denote are not entirely equivalent to that which is conveyed by the antonym ἀταξία. In fact, the use that our sources make of it in a military context shows that the term cannot always be translated by using the English antonyms *disorder* or *insubordination*.⁵⁷ For example, in defending himself from the accusation of being too harsh with his soldiers, Xenophon claims to resort to physical punishments only in specific situations:

[...] I admit, soldiers, that I have indeed struck men because of their ἀταξία, the men who were content to be kept safe by you who marched in good τάξις and fought wherever there was need, while they themselves would leave the τάξις and run on ahead in the desire to secure plunder and to enjoy an advantage over you. For if all of us had behaved in this way, all of us alike would have perished.

Xen. An. 5.8.13⁵⁸

Although the action of abandoning the ranks may cause disorder in the τάξις, the disarray feels here more of a consequence, an outcome produced by what Xenophon conveys through the term ἀταξία. Therefore, the object of the punishment is neither the disorder *per se*, nor the act of insubordination that may cause it, but rather the selfish, individualistic attitude shown by some soldiers who contravene the orders and undermine the cohesion of the phalanx for personal gain.⁵⁹ The psychological nuances embedded in ἀταξία are hardly a novelty to be credited to Xenophon, as they can be already appreciated in Thucydides' use of the term: for instance, as soon as the Athenians

files' and Schwartz 2009:195-198 stresses the importance of maintaining a *cohesive* formation at all times.

⁵⁶ See Fergusson 1986:73 *s.v.* open; 79 *s.v.* cohesion; 295 *s.v.* order.

⁵⁷ Two meanings that the term ἀταξία may still retain. However, its use in hendiadys such as ἀταξία καὶ ἀκολασία (*cf.* Pl. *Cri.* 53d 3-4) or ἀμαθία καὶ ἀταξία (*Cf.* Xen. [*Ath.*] *Pol.* 1.5.4) suggests that the term has always been endowed with a moral or ethical sense.

⁵⁸ Brownson 1961.

⁵⁹ A frequent situation in Xenophon's experience, *cf.* Xen. *An.* 4.3.30; 5.4.16, 20; 5.7.13-7. *Cf.* also a similar situation in Thuc. 7.13.2.

[...] dashed forward in great ἀταξία, as if they had already won [ὡς κεκρατηκότων] [...] The Boeotians made the first stand against them, attacked them, routed them, and put them to flight.

Thuc. 7.43.7⁶⁰

Here Thucydides uses ἀταξία to suggest the image of a sudden disorder within the Athenian ranks, yet the disarray is again the result of an equally disordered mental state in which the soldiers have stepped, seduced this time not by gain but by a false sense of hope and security.⁶¹ Something similar may happen when the mind of the soldier is troubled by the opposite feeling — that of despair. Thucydides presents Gylippos addressing his army before the attack: as he describes the situation of the Athenians, he says that:

[...] the excess of their sufferings and the necessities of their present distress have made them desperate; they have no confidence in their force, but wish to try their fortune in the only way they can [...]

Thuc. 7.67.4⁶²

Thucydides notes that the current circumstances have brought the Athenians ἐξ ἀπόνουαν — to the point that they are beginning to lose the grip on their own minds — but a few lines later he has Gylippos refer to this condition by using the term ἀταξία (7.68.1). This instance exceeds the usual interpretation and understanding of the term as ‘disorder in the formation’ or ‘insubordination’, as it is clearly used with reference to a mental state. Therefore, by using 7.68.1 as an interpretative key, an alternative reading of the other instances could be proposed: in Thuc. 5.6.10 the Athenians are said to be πεφοβημένοι, stricken by fear, and are for this reason affected by ἀταξία, and as a consequence they fall into confusion and let their formation end in disarray. Likewise, in Thuc. 7.43.7, they act ὡς κεκρατηκότες, under the influence of an excessive confidence that causes ἀταξία, the consequences of which are again an act of insubordination that causes their formation to shatter. Strictly speaking, disorder or insubordination are not ἀταξία but rather its possible outcomes. The term would seem, then, to refer to a dynamic degenerative process that begins when a strong emotion infects the mind of the soldier and gradually takes hold of him, until it becomes his definitive state. The meaning of the positive term εὐταξία should emerge along similar lines, and could be understood as a dynamic mental process of opposite nature and outcomes.

⁶⁰ Smith 1965.

⁶¹ In Aristotle’s own words, here the Athenians would not be ἀνδρεῖοι but merely θαρραλέοι, because ‘they think they are stronger than the enemy, and not likely to come to any harm’ (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1117a).

⁶² Smith 1965.

When engaged in it, a soldier would ideally remain capable of maintaining his self-control, no matter what δαίματα and φόβοι he goes through.

In conclusion, the acquisition of the terms εὐταξία and ἀταξία to the lexical field of war, and the development of their meaning, seem to reflect the on-going debate on military professionalism in the fifth and fourth centuries. Starting with Thucydides,⁶³ these terms seemingly begin to stand for two contrasting behaviours on the battlefield, the opposition of which mirrors and realises that between the χειροτέχνης and the amateur of war. Later on, Xenophon receives these terms from Thucydides in their new specialised meaning, yet begins to expand their understanding by projecting them onto a broader philosophical frame of interpretation. Plato stands at the end, if not aside, of this process of redefinition: by entrusting the expression of the opposition received from Thucydides to the couple εὐψυχία — κακοψυχία, he centres the spotlight directly onto the psychological dynamics that produce the two behaviours. Now read as ἡθὴ τῆς ψυχῆς, the trait of ‘discipline’ / ‘order in formation’ [εὐταξία] and ‘indiscipline’ / ‘disorder in formation’ [ἀταξία] could be seen as the manifestations of these psychological dynamics, in Aristotelian terms their distinctive ἔργα. As a result, the perception that authors of the fifth and fourth century seem to have of the τέχνη required to fight within the phalanx does not appear to revolve solely around a skill, but also around an ethical⁶⁴ crossroads that leads to two opposite mental states. Thus, to fight professionally becomes to make a choice between two irreconcilable ἡθῆ, which the hoplite has to face dynamically, at every step of the battle.

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⁶³ It is worth noting that Herodotus knows the term ἀταξία yet uses it only twice throughout his histories (cf. Hdt. 6.11.2; 6.13.1), whereas εὐταξία, along with the conceptual opposition it creates with its antonym, is not found. Moreover, in Herodotus the term has a military connotation only once (cf. Hdt. 6.13.1).

⁶⁴ Brizzi 2008:17: *Al principio per così dire tecnico della posizione come premessa indispensabile dell’azione collettiva, finiscono in tal modo per essere associati valori etici, come quelli, appunto, di disciplina, di ordine, di spirito, di corpo.*

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